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PART SIX OF SEVEN

CRISIS IN CONSCIENCE

QUASAR

50 YEARS OF CAPTAIN AMERICA
1941 – 1991

WENDELL VAUGHN . . . THE FIRST EARTH MAN EVER APPOINTED PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE. BONDED TO THE ENERGY-TRANSFORMING QUANTUM-BANDS THAT ARE BOTH WEAPONS AND SYMBOLS OF HIS STATION, HE FIGHTS AN ONGOING BATTLE TO DEFEND ALL LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE FROM COSMIC EVIL!

STAN LEE PRESENTS . . . QUASAR!

MAELSTROM MANIFEST

OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, EARTH, SOLAR SYSTEM, MILKY WAY . . .

ONE MONTH, TWO WEEKS, TWO DAYS, SIX HOURS, ELEVEN MINUTES, FIFTEEN SECONDS AGO . . .

YOU . . . ARE THE *UNBEING?*

HUH? YEAH, AND WHO THE HECK ARE *YOU?*

I AM *MAELSTROM* THE LIVING ANOMALY . . . PRIME AGENT OF OBLIVION.

IRON MAN

COOL! ALWAYS HAPPY TO MEET A FELLOW MASTER OF THE *DARK FORCES!*

PROLOG VI

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I WANTED TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO *THANK YOU* FOR MAKING EON'S SUPPOSED PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE TEMPORARILY *UNDETECTED*.

OF COURSE! HAD YOU NOT CANCELED HIS *ORIGIN*, I COULD NEVER HAVE PASSED THROUGH HIS *SURVEILLANCE WEB* AROUND THE EARTH *UNDETECTED*.

YOU MUST MEAN THAT *QUASAR* GUY.

*SEE QUASAR #18.

WHAT--WHAT DO YOU MEAN "*TEMPORARILY*"? WHAT I UNCREATE, I UNCREATE *FOR KEEPS*.

SURELY YOU DO NOT BELIEVE THAT SUCH A *COSMICALLY-CONNECTED* PERSON AS HE WILL TAKE HIS UNDOING *LYING DOWN*!

WELL--UM, I'M STILL KINDA *NEW* TO THIS PARTICULAR BODY. I DON'T QUITE HAVE EVERYTHING COMPLETELY *UNDER CONTROL* YET.

THANKS FOR THE WARNING, MAN. I'LL--*HEY!*

GOING ALREADY?

YES... QUASAR IS VERY *NEAR*, AND I HAVE MUCH TO DO.

ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP *WRECK THE UNIVERSE*, LET ME KNOW.

THE BODY OF A TEN YEAR OLD BOY IS AN *UNSEEMLY FORM* FOR A NEAR-OMNIPOTENT ENTITY SUCH AS THE *UNBEING*.

BUT *THAT* IS NOT MY CONCERN.

MY CONCERN, AT THIS JUNCTURE, IS TO FIND A *DWELLING PLACE* THAT BEFITS MY STATION AS EARTH'S SINGLE MOST POWERFUL PERSONAGE.

I WILL FIND A *MILLIONAIRE'S ESTATE*, NOT FAR FROM WHERE QUASAR HAS HIS BASE OF OPERATIONS.

I WILL CAUSE THAT MILLIONAIRE TO SUFFER A *CEREBRAL HEMORRHAGE*--JUST AS I INFLICTED ONE UPON *QUASAR'S FATHER*--AND THEN CONFISCATE ALL HIS *POSSESSIONS*.

THEN, AFTER QUASAR DISPENSES WITH THE *UNBEING'S MANIPULATIONS* AND DEFEATS MY *PAWNS*, I WILL LURE HIM INTO MY STRONGHOLD FOR OUR FINAL ENCOUNTER...

THE PRESENT. HIGH ABOVE THE EARTH.

COSMIC AWARENESS IS *MINE*, DEATHURGE.

I UNDERSTAND THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE--HOW EVERYTHING IS *RELATED* TO EVERYTHING ELSE!

KNOWLEDGE IS THE ABSOLUTE *POWER*!

STOPPING THE EARTH'S *ROTATION* IS BUT THE MEREST *PRELUDE* TO MY ULTIMATE GOAL--

--TO STOP THE KINETIC MOTION OF THE *UNIVERSE* ITSELF--

--REVERSE ITS DIRECTION AND CAUSE THE COSMOS TO *COLLAPSE UPON ITSELF*!

YOU *REALLY* POSSESS POWER ON THAT LEVEL MAELSTROM?

YOU DARE *DOUBT* ME, DEATHURGE? *HA*! NOT ONLY DO I HAVE MY ORIGINAL *KINETIC ENERGY-MANIPULATING* POWERS--

--I HAVE ALSO ASSUMED THE ATTRIBUTES OF REALITY-BENDING ABSTRACT ENTITY *ANOMALY*--

--STOLEN THE *QUANTUM-BANDS* FROM EON'S LACKEY--

--AND WRESTED THE SECRET OF *COSMIC AWARENESS* FROM THAT MOST DECREPIT OF TIME BEINGS, EON HIMSELF!

ASTOUNDING, SIRE, THAT A BEING BORN OF YOUR *HUMBLE STATION* COULD HAVE ACHIEVED *SO MUCH*.

BUT WHAT ABOUT *EON'S LACKEY*? WHERE *IS* HE?

YOU MEAN THAT *ENERGY SIMULACRUM* THAT THINKS IT'S QUASAR? *NOWHERE* IN THIS UNIVERSE.

APPARENTLY TRYING TO DECIDE WHETHER TO SAVE HIS *WORLD* OR THE GREATER *UNIVERSE* PROVED TOO MUCH FOR HIM TO HANDLE.

HE FLED INTO THE TRACKLESS *QUANTUM ZONE*.*

*LAST ISSUE.

IT MAY INDEED BE A *PLOY*. BUT I AM NOT WORRIED. THE MOMENT HE *REAPPEARS* IN REAL SPACE I WILL *KNOW* IT AND DEAL WITH HIM THEN.

MILORD, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WISH FOR *ME* TO DO?

YES, PUT THAT *WATCHER'S EYES* OUT.

WHAT WATCHER?

THE ONE *BEHIND* YOU.

DOES IT NOT *BOTHER* YOU TO DESTROY THE *SPHERE* UPON WHICH YOU WERE *BORN*?

HA!

AND THIS *DESIGN* YOU HAVE FOR THE GREATER UNIVERSE. IF YOU SUCCEED, WILL YOU *YOURSELF* NOT BE DESTROYED IN THE COLLAPSE OF THE COSMOS?

IT IS AGAINST MY *HERITAGE* TO DIRECTLY ENGAGE IN ANY *MEANINGFUL ACTION*, MAELSTROM...

...BUT I VENTURE FORTH FROM MY OBSERVATION OUTPOST TO BESEECH YOU TO *RECONSIDER* YOUR ACTIONS.

YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT AND *SEE*, WATCHER!

GONE.

YOU'VE SEEN *ENOUGH*, WATCHER!

I THINK *NOT*.

I ALMOST *HAD* YOU, YOU VOID-SUCKING VOYEUR!

THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SANCTUM SANCTORUM OF EARTH'S SORCERER SUPREME **DOCTOR STRANGE**...

GREAT GAEA THE EARTH MOTHER... THANK YOU FOR HEEDING MY SUMMONS!

THE WORLD AT YOUR WOMB IS IN A STATE OF UTTER **CATASTROPHE**! SOME **PHYSICAL FORCE**--BEYOND MY MYSTICAL ACUMEN--HAS STOPPED THE **EARTH'S ROTATION**!

IN A MATTER OF MINUTES, UNIMAGINABLE **DISASTER** WILL WRACK THE SPHERE AS THE EARTH'S NATURAL FORCES CONTEND AGAINST THIS UNNATURAL **CESSATION OF MOTION**.

SO ENORMOUS A CALAMITY IS BEYOND THE PARAMETERS OF MY **MAGICAL MIGHT**. WHAT THEN CAN BE **DONE** TO AVERT WORLDWIDE TECTONIC UPHEAVAL?

NO ONE ON EARTH HAS THE POWER TO **RESTART** THE MOTION OF MY POOR **WORLD-CHILD**, STEPHEN...

...BUT PERHAPS A *UNION* BETWEEN YOU AND THE MIGHTIEST PRACTITIONERS OF THE *ANCIENT WAYS* CAN AT LEAST *SUSPEND* THE TIDE OF DESTRUCTION FOR A TIME...!

I SHALL CONTACT THEM *AT ONCE!*

FELLOW MYSTICS, HEED MY CALL!

HELP ME FACE WHAT GRIPS US ALL!

WE'RE HERE, DOCTOR!

ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE, ENTER THE *DEEPEST TRANCE* OF WHICH YOU ARE CAPABLE--

--AND LEND ME YOUR *PROPORTIONATE COMMAND* OVER THE ELDRITCH FORCES!

MOTION OF THE INNER EARTH STRAINING TOWARDS UPHEAVAL...

QUELL YOUR PENT-UP FURY;

GIVE US TIME TO RIGHT THIS EVIL!

ELSEWHERE, A VORTEX FORMS...

THE UNIVERSE IS *EXPANDING* UNIFORMLY IN ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE.

IT HAS *NO BOUNDARIES*. NO OUTER EDGES FROM WHICH ONE MIGHT MEASURE ITS *DIAMETER* IN ORDER TO DETERMINE ITS *TOPOGRAPHICAL CENTER*.

MOST OF THE UNIVERSE'S *MASS* IS *UNDETECTABLE* BY HUMAN INSTRUMENTATION.

I, *MAELSTROM*, THE ABSOLUTE MASTER OF MOTION, HAVE CHALLENGED *ALL THREE* OF THESE FUNDAMENTAL PROPERTIES OF THE UNIVERSE.

I HAVE *STOPPED* THE UNIVERSE'S RAMPANT *EXPANSION*.

I HAVE ARBITRARILY ASSIGNED *THIS SPOT* THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE.

I HAVE SHUNTED THE *MISSING MASS* OF THE UNIVERSE OUT INTO THE OPEN HERE

...CAUSING IT TO *ACCRUE*.

...CAUSING IT TO CREATE A *BLACK HOLE* THAT IN A MATTER OF MINUTES NOW DWARFS THE ENTIRE *MILKY WAY GALAXY* IN SIZE...

...CAUSING ALL MATTER IN THE UNIVERSE TO BE INEXORABLY DRAWN TOWARD THIS VERY *SPOT*.

IT WOULD NOT BE *PRUDENT* FOR ME TO RISK BEING SUCKED INTO THE *CENTER OF ANNIHILATION*... NOT WHEN I STILL HAVE SOME *PERSONAL MATTERS* TO ATTEND TO.

NOW IT WOULD BEHOOVE ME TO *LEAVE*. I MAY BE *OMNISCIENT*... AND I MAY BE THE MOST *DANGEROUS BEING* IN THE COSMOS... BUT I AM *NOT* ALL-POWERFUL... *YET*.

MY WORK HERE IS *DONE*. I HAVE SET UNSTOPPABLE FORCES INTO MOTION.

THE QUANTUM ZONE, AN INFINITE REALM OF POTENTIAL ENERGY TANGENT TO OUR COSMOS...

SOME PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE I AM--RUNNING OUT ON THE EARTH LIKE I DID.

BUT THE COSMIC AWARENESS EON BEQUEATHED TO ME MADE ME INTUIT THAT THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE IS TO STOP PLAYING BY MAELSTROM'S RULES.

HERE, OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSE, OUTSIDE MAELSTROM'S AWARENESS, I CAN AT LEAST FIGURE OUT MY NEXT MOVE WITHOUT HIM INSTANTLY KNOWING WHAT IT IS.

HERE, PERHAPS, I CAN--

WHAT'S THAT?

I'VE SKIMMED THROUGH THE QUANTUM ZONE COUNTLESS TIMES AND I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT--!

LET ME CONCENTRATE... FOCUS MY COSMIC AWARENESS ON--

Oh, my God--!

IT'S--

I GREET YOU, SON OF EARTH.

BACK IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD...

AH! THE STAR-SYSTEM SCALE *WORLDSHIP* OF THE MIGHTY DEVOURER OF WORLDS!

EXACTLY WHERE MY OMNISCIENT BRAIN *TOLD* ME IT WOULD BE.

AND WITHIN, I SENSE, THE MASTER *AWAITS*, OBLIVIOUS TO MY APPROACH.

THE ASSUMPTION OF A PHYSICAL FORM OF *GREATER STATURE* THAN HIS OWN SHOULD COMMAND HIS ATTENTION.

GREETINGS, *GALACTUS!*

...

I AM *MAELSTROM!*

IN THE COSMIC SCHEME OF THINGS, MY POSITION IS MORE EXALTED THAN *YOURS.*

DUE TO YOUR *PRE-BIG BANG ORIGIN*, YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF TO BE *UNIQUE* AMONG THE BEINGS OF THE UNIVERSE.

YET, LIKE THE *LOWLIEST* OF CREATURES, YOU DEPEND UPON *OUTSIDE SUSTENANCE.*

YOU ARE *RULED* BY YOUR ENORMOUS HUNGER, GALACTUS! BUT YOU ARE NOT *HUNGER ITSELF!*

I, ON THE OTHER HAND EMBODY A *CONCEPT.*

I AM THE *GREAT MAELSTROM* THAT WILL DEVOUR THE UNIVERSE YOU DEPEND UPON TO SATISFY YOUR APPETITE.

I AM *BEYOND* ALL MANIFESTATIONS OF YOUR POWER. NOT EVEN YOUR *ULTIMATE NULLIFIER* WILL AVAIL YOU AGAINST ME FOR WHILE I ENGAGED YOU IN CONVERSATION, I HAVE SURROUNDED IT IN AN INPENETRABLE *VORTEX.*

LOOK UPON ME, GALACTUS, AND *DESPAIR...!*

MALCOLM STROMBERG'S ESTATE, LONG ISLAND...

KAYLA--KEN--DO NOT BE AFRAID. DESPITE HIS FEARSOME COUNTENANCE, THE FIERY-SKULLED DEMON MEANS US NO HARM.

YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, HEATHER?

INNOCENT BLOOD HAS BEEN SPILLED, BUT THE GUILTY HAS FLED.

I AM AWARE OF THAT, GHOST RIDER. I APPRECIATE YOUR INTERVENTION, NEVERTHELESS.

NOW PLEASE HAND OVER QUASAR'S BODY TO ME...

DO YOU KNOW WHO DID THIS TO HIM?

YES. THE OWNER OF THIS ESTATE. HE IS NOT HERE. IN FACT, HE IS NOT EVEN TRULY HUMAN. I DOUBT EVEN YOU HAVE THE POWER TO PUNISH HIM.

WE'LL SEE.

IF YOU TRULY WISH TO BE OF FURTHER SERVICE, YOU WOULD TAKE MY TWO COMPANIONS FROM THIS HOUSE OF HORROR.

WOMAN... I AM NOT AN ERRAND BOY.

THIS DEMON'S MIND... NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FATHOM.

THESE TWO ARE INNOCENT. IF YOU WOULD PREVENT THEIR BLOOD FROM BEING SPILLED YOU WOULD REMOVE THEM FROM HERE.

OR DO YOU SECRETLY LIKE IT WHEN INNOCENT BLOOD IS SPILLED? BECAUSE THEN--AND ONLY THEN--YOU ARE FREE TO PERFORM THE RITES OF VENGEANCE YOU SO LOVE TO DO?

GET ON.

HE CAN BE *TRUSTED*. GO WITH HIM. QUICKLY. HAVE HIM TAKE YOU TO OUR *OFFICE FACILITY*.

THERE'S STILL *WORK* FOR ME TO DO HERE. I'LL JOIN YOU AS SOON AS I CAN.

vrrrmm

reeeeeeee

OH, QUASAR, MY *BELOVED*...! THE *GLORIES* WE COULD HAVE ATTAINED TOGETHER NOW CAN *NEVER* COME TO BE.

ALL IS LOST. *YOU* ARE DEAD, *MAKKARI* IS DEAD. I CAN NO LONGER CONTACT *EON*, SO *ME* MAY WELL BE DEAD, TOO...

AND THOUGH FEW KNOW IT AS YET, THE *EARTH* HAS STOPPED *SPINNING* AND WIDESPREAD *METEOROLOGICAL DEVASTATION* IS IMMINENT.

THAT MONGREL *MAELSTROM* IS THE AUTHOR OF ALL THIS EVIL, BUT HE IS NOWHERE IN THE RANGE OF MY *HEIGHTENED SENSES*.

EVEN IF HE *WERE*, WHAT COULD I DO? TO HALT THE EARTH, HE MUST POSSESS POWER *BEYOND* ANYBODY ELSE'S ON THE WHOLE PLANET.

I AM *POWERLESS* TO DO ANYTHING, EXCEPT TAKE YOUR AND MAKKARI'S *BODIES* FROM THIS WRETCHED SITE...

...AND *MOURN* FOR US ALL.

ELSEWHERE, FAR FROM EARTH...

AHA! THE RETREAT OF THE MAD TITANIAN, *THANOS*! AGAIN JUST WHERE MY COSMIC AWARENESS INFORMED ME IT WOULD BE!

THANOS' TASTE IN ARCHITECTURE CERTAINLY RUNS TO THE *SYMBOLICALLY BAROQUE*.

STILL, I DARE NOT DISMISS HIM AS AN *OBSESSIVE ECCENTRIC*. THE *INFINITY GEMS* IN HIS POSSESSION MAY WELL *SURPASS* THE POWER OF THE *QUANTUM-BANDS*... PROVIDED THANOS WAS *ADEPT* IN THEIR USE...!

I SENSE HE IS *NOT ALONE*. THE MOST PREEMINENT OF THE EARTH DEMONS IS WITH HIM... *MEPHISTO!*

LORD THANOS... DO YOU *FEEL* IT?

THE APPROACH OF SOMETHING... *EVIL*?

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO *INTRODUCE* MYSELF. THANOS.

I AM *MAELSTROM*, THE ONE BEING IN ALL THE UNIVERSE WHO DOES NOT *FEAR* YOU AND YOUR INFINITY GEMS.

YOU FANCY YOURSELF *GOD*, DON'T YOU? BUT DON'T YOU REALIZE HOW *PAROCHIAL* THE VERY CONCEPT OF "GOD" HAS BECOME?

THE VAST MAJORITY OF ALL SENTIENT RACES IN THE UNIVERSE HAVE *ABANDONED* THEIR BELIEF IN A SINGLE ANTHROPOMORPHIC OMNISCIENT ENTITY OF CREATION AND DESTRUCTION. BUT *YOU*, THANOS? NO, *NOT YOU*.

PERHAPS... COULD IT *BE*? THAT YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF CONCEIVING ANYTHING *GREATER* THAN GODHOOD? YES, I DO *BELIEVE* THAT IS THE CASE WITH YOU.

YOUR *VANITY* AND YOUR LACK OF *SOPHISTICATION* WILL PROVE YOUR UNDOING...

INSOLENT SPECK!

GOD IS EVERYTHING AND I AM GOD!

IN THAT CASE, THANOS, YOU'VE JUST MET AN *ATHEIST.*

WHO WAS THAT MAN?!?

WHSSSST

HE SAID HIS NAME WAS--

I *KNOW* WHAT HE SAID! I WANT TO KNOW WHERE HE *CAME FROM*--HOW HE CAME BY HIS *ATTRIBUTES!*

DOES IT TRULY *MATTER*, MILORD? YOU *OBLITERATED* HIM.

I *DID*? I THOUGHT... I SAW HIM *STANDING* IN THE WAKE OF MY BLAST... *HEARD* HIM...!

NO, SIRE... I BELIEVE IT WAS ONLY THE *COSMIC WIND*...

THE QUANTUM ZONE...

YOU...ARE *INFINITY*, THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE SPATIAL ASPECT OF THE UNIVERSE...

YES, MY SON.

THEN--YOU MUST KNOW WHAT IS *HAPPENING* WITHIN YOUR *BODY*! THERE IS A *HOLE* AT THE VERY CENTER OF YOUR BEING--WHICH THREATENS TO ENGULF *EVERYTHING*--TURN YOU *INSIDE OUT*!

I AM AWARE OF THIS, MY SON.

YOU MUST DO SOMETHING THEN!

YES... WHEN I REALIZED IT WASN'T EON, I KNEW IT HAD TO BE YOU...

I HAVE. I PLUCKED YOU FROM DEATH'S EMBRACE AND FASHIONED A NEW BODY FOR YOU FROM THE INFINITE FORCE YOUR QUANTUM-BANDS TAP.

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO STOP MAELSTROM, FOR WHILE MAELSTROM MERELY TAPS THE POWER OF INFINITY, YOU, SON OF EARTH, ARE ONE WITH THE POWER!

GO TO THE POINT OF SPATIAL IMPLOSION. THERE YOU MUST DISCOVER HOW TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE THE USURPER HAS DONE. I HAVE UTTER CONFIDENCE IN YOU.

THANK YOU, MA'AM... FOR THE CHANCE TO REDEEM MYSELF. I'LL TRY NOT TO LET YOU DOWN...

ELSEWHERE...

THE MOTHERSHIP OF THE PRIME CELESTIAL HOST...!

NO DOUBT BELOW PASSING JUDGMENT ON A RACE OF CREATURES THEY DEEM EUGENICALLY UNFIT!

"YES, THERE IS ARISHEM, LEADER OF THE LANDING PARTY, HARNESSING A MERE FRACTION OF HIS UNFATHOMABLE POWER TO CLEANSE THE PLANET'S SURFACE OF OFFENSIVE LIFE.

"GALACTUS...THANOS... THE CELESTIALS... ALL OF THEM ENGAGING IN THE EXTINCTION OF LIFE, EACH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.

"IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO HAVE PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF ALL AGENTS OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION... FOR IN THE FINAL DAYS BEFORE THE UNIVERSE COLLAPSES, I WILL HAVE SPECIAL ROLES FOR THEM ALL TO PLAY...

MIGHTY ARISHEM--I AM *MAELSTROM* AND I HAVE COME TO INFORM YOU AND YOUR BROOD THAT THE *ACTIVITY* YOU HAVE ENGAGED IN SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL--

--THE SOWING AND HARVESTING OF *ORGANIC LIFE* THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE--

FOR SOON, WHEN *SPACE COLLAPSES*, LIFE SIMPLY WILL NOT MATTER.

--HAS BECOME *OBSOLETE*.

I SENSE THAT YOU ARE *JUDGING* ME, ARISHEM. YET YOUR JUDGMENT WILL BE *INADEQUATE*. FOR YOU ARE *INCAPABLE* OF JUDGING A BEING SUPERIOR TO YOURSELF.

I KNOW YOU FOR WHAT YOU *ARE*. I SEE THE *REASON* WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO. I KNOW YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF TO BE *INFALLIBLE*.

YOU *JUDGE*, ARISHEM--BUT YOU ARE *NOT* JUDGMENT ITSELF!

YOUR DESTRUCTION OF UNFIT WORLDS IS *POINTLESS*, FOR I HAVE JUDGED THE *UNIVERSE ITSELF* AS UNFIT--

--AND THAT IS WHAT I--

NO! HE'S *BACK!*

I MUST GO!

THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE...

INFINITY THINKS I CAN *DO IT*... REVERSE THE *COLLAPSE OF THE COSMOS!*

WISH SHE'D HAVE GIVEN ME SOME *CLUE* AS TO HOW.

I'M TRYING TO TAKE THE *MISSING MASS* OF THE UNIVERSE AND PUT IT BACK WHERE IT'S BEING *SHUNTED FROM--*

--BUT IT'S *NOT WORKING!*

NOT *OUT HERE*, OUTSIDE THE BLACK HOLE, AT ANY RATE. LOOKS LIKE I'M ACTUALLY GOING TO HAVE TO GO *INSIDE IT*.

I'M NOT *SURE* ABOUT THAT. I'M NOT SURE IF THE BODY OF *QUANTUM FORCE* INFINITY GAVE ME CAN *WITHSTAND* THE UTTER COMPRESSION WITHIN.

IF IT'S EATING *INFINITY'S BODY* LIKE A *CANCER*, AND MY BODY IS JUST A *MANIFESTATION* OF INFINITY'S -- THEN I'D BE *NUTS* TO THINK I CAN BLITHELY ZIP IN AND OUT.

IF ONLY MY COSMIC AWARENESS EXTENDED BEYOND THE *EVENT HORIZON* OF THIS COSMOS--INTO THE *UNIMAGINABLE CHAOS* WITHIN THAT HOLE!

BUT IT *DOESN'T*. SO ONCE MORE I'LL HAVE TO THROW MYSELF INTO THE *BREACH*.

WHY IS IT THAT I KEEP FINDING *BIGGER BREACHES* TO THROW MYSELF INTO?

THIS HAS GOT TO BE *IT*. THE *ULTIMATE* BREACH. THERE CAN'T BE ANYTHING *DEEPER, DARKER* OR MORE *UNKNOWABLE* THAN THIS...

...CAN THERE?

HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE, WHELP? HOW CAN YOU BE HERE, POSSESSED OF SUCH POWER?

YOU HAVE *COSMIC AWARENESS*, MAELY. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW-- *USE IT*.

...INFINITY?!?

BAH!

YOU HAVE *YOUR* BENEFACTOR--I HAVE *MINE*!

AND IT IS ALWAYS FAR *EASIER* TO *DESTROY* THAN TO *MAINTAIN* OR *CREATE*!

TACKLED ME-- TRYING TO *DISTRACT* ME--!

DON'T LOOK NOW, MAELSTROM, BUT YOU JUST KNOCKED US TOWARD THE *BLACK HOLE*!

WONDER *WHICH* OF US--IF EITHER--HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO *SURVIVE IT*!

INSIDE...

IT ALL ENDS *HERE*, MAELSTROM.

I'VE FIGURED OUT HOW TO *BEAT YOU.*

NOOO